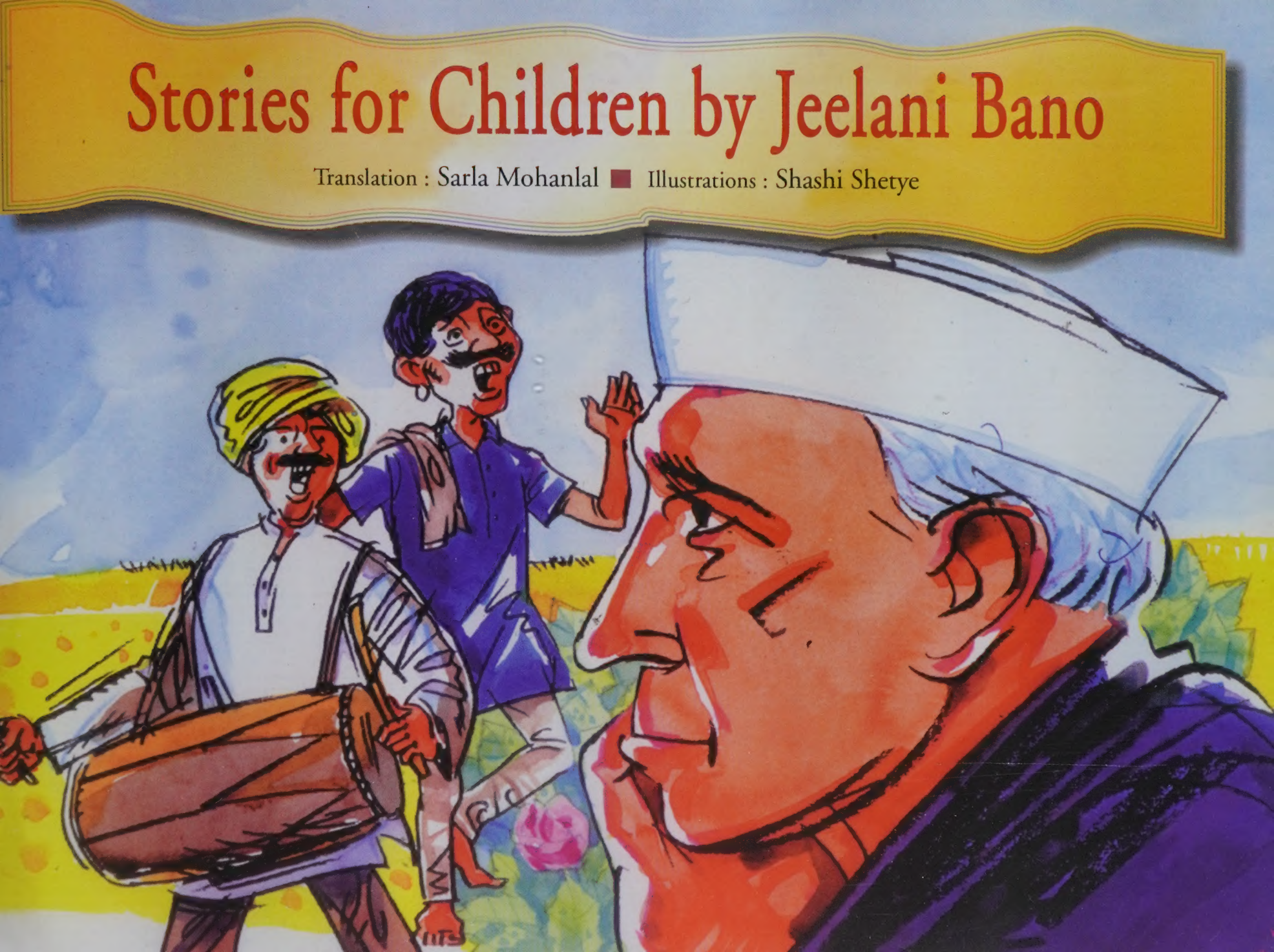
Stories for Children by Jeelani Bano

Translation : Sarla Mohanlal ■ Illustrations : Shashi Shetye



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The Smiling Rose

Like all children, I was very fond of collecting pictures of flowers, animals, filmstars, of my sisters and brothers and others. But what I liked most were pictures of Nehru Chacha. Whenever I saw his photo in any newspaper, I would cut it and keep it in my bag. I had also sketched many pictures of Nehru Chacha with pencil and colour brush.

But I was very surprised when I saw one of his pictures in a newspaper in which Nehru Chacha was digging the earth with a pickaxe. Why is Nehru Chacha doing this work? This is the work of labourers. What was the great hurry that he could not even wait for the labourers?

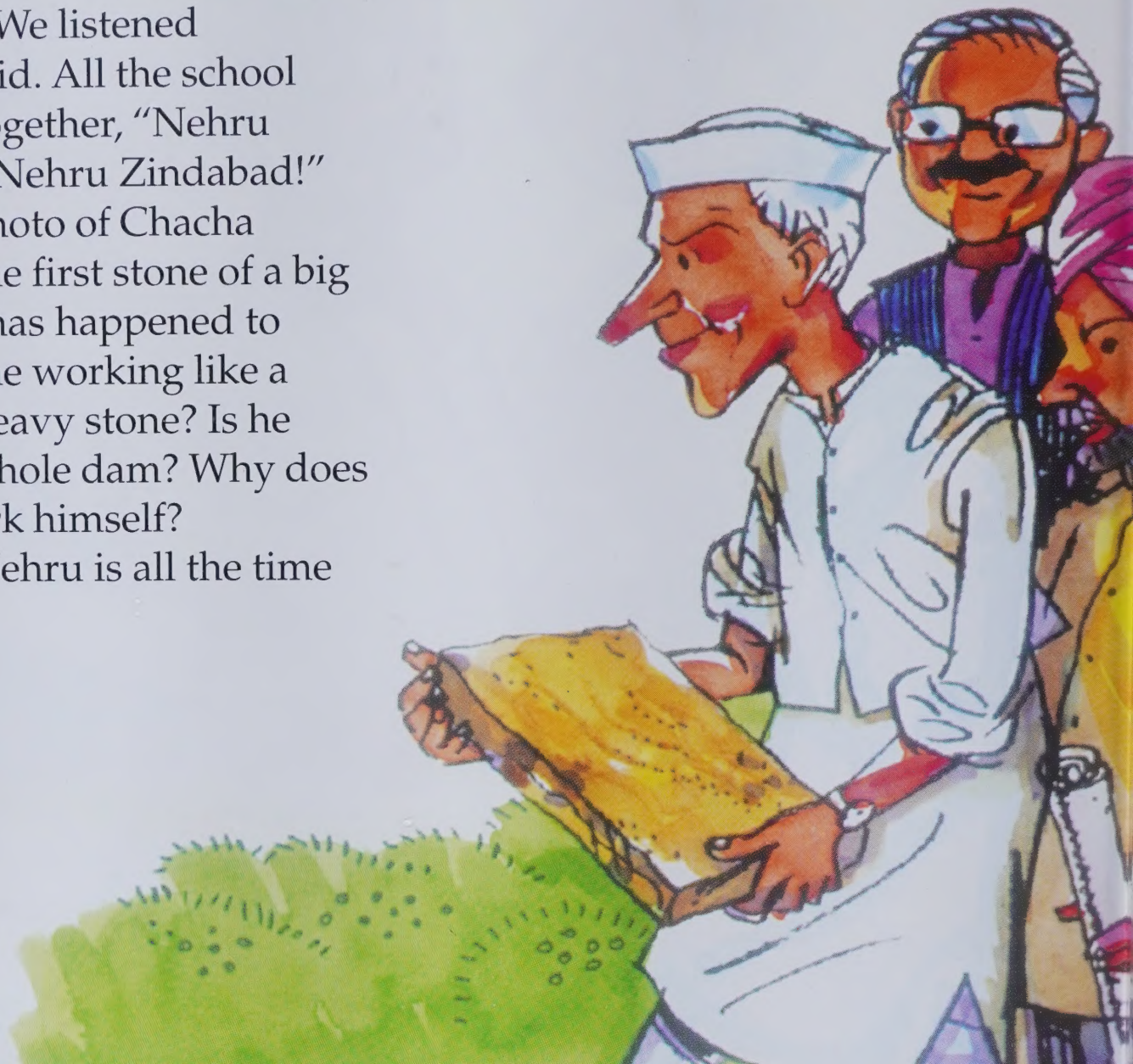
I had read the life of Chacha Nehru in a small booklet. He was the pride of Anand Bhawan and the only son of a famous lawyer.

Nehru Chacha had performed many good deeds, suffered many hardships to become a respected leader. And then he became the Prime Minister of India. But why is he

digging the earth with a pickaxe? I thought about it again and again. We children used to call him Chacha Nehru. We listened attentively to what he said. All the school children used to shout together, "Nehru Chacha is ours! Chacha Nehru Zindabad!"

Then I saw another photo of Chacha Nehru. He was laying the first stone of a big dam. I wondered what has happened to Nehru Chacha. Why is he working like a labourer lifting such a heavy stone? Is he going to construct the whole dam? Why does he want to do every work himself?

My father says that Nehru is all the time working in the office.



He goes out to stop people from fighting with each other. He is trying to establish peace throughout the world. He appeals to live together in harmony.

Then it occurred to me that he is trying secretly to build something new. Just like my friend Guddu who had made a doll's house. Chacha Nehru will also surprise everyone one day by building a new house. People will wonder that he sits in his office the whole day and goes out to stop people from fighting; then how was he able to build this house? Then I will say that I knew about it long ago!

Now I started looking carefully at all the photographs of Chacha Nehru published in newspapers.

One day he was shown holding a flute and dancing with the villagers. Oh dear! Now he is involved in these gimmicks? Now all his other works will remain incomplete. What song is he playing on the flute?

Then I saw another photo of Chacha Nehru. He was bending down to plant a small seedling. What plant is this? Will it give flowers or fruit? All of us sisters and brothers talked about it. Why is Chacha Nehru working so hard? He doesn't even take someone's help in planting trees. What flowers does he want to grow?

I waited a long time and then wrote a letter to Chacha Nehru. I did not tell my brothers and sisters about it. I sealed the envelope containing the letter with gum. In this letter I had written that I knew his secret. Therefore, he must tell me why he was digging the land. Which seedling was he planting...?

Then I waited for the postman. He brought lots of letters daily but there was no letter from the Prime Minister Nehru.

One day I asked the postman if the Prime Minister had sent any letter for me. But instead of replying he laughed and went away.

Since then, all the pictures of Chacha Nehru that appeared in the newspapers showed him doing one work or the other. They were all useless works. Either he was addressing the public, standing on a raised platform, or he was shaking hands with someone, or trying to explain something to his colleague. Distraught, I used to wonder as to why he doesn't pay attention to his own work. I hope he is not so busy as to forget about the hard ground he had dug, just to plant a seedling!

One evening I was studying with my teacher and my father was talking to his friend Shankar Chacha. Shankar Chacha was saying, "But Pandit Nehru has to do a very important and necessary work just now."

I closed my book and after greeting Shankar Chacha asked him, "Chachaji, what is this most important work of Nehru Chacha? What is he busy with now a days?"

He lovingly put his hand on my head and said, "Munni Beti, he is making a new India for you."

"For me?" I jumped with happiness I wondered what would the 'New India' be like... When will I see it...? Has Nehru Chacha received my letter...?

Shankar Chacha laughed at what I said. Abba told him that I love Nehru Chacha and talk about him all the time. Then he asked me to leave them as they had important things to discuss. I was so happy that I forgot about my studies.

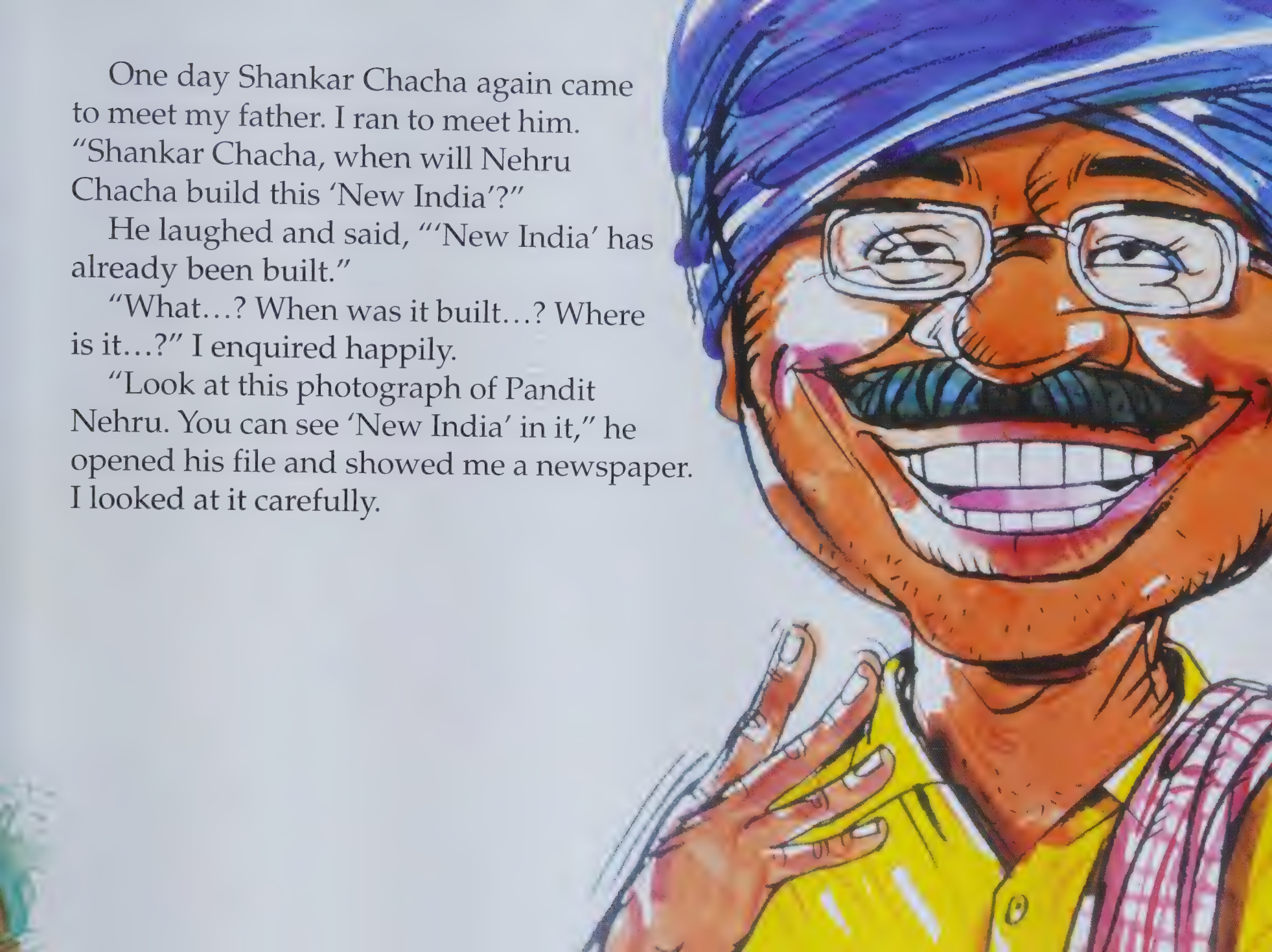
Chacha Nehru is making a 'New India'. Who knows what sort of 'New India' it would be! Chacha Nehru is building this 'New India' for me.

One day Shankar Chacha again came to meet my father. I ran to meet him. "Shankar Chacha, when will Nehru Chacha build this 'New India'?"

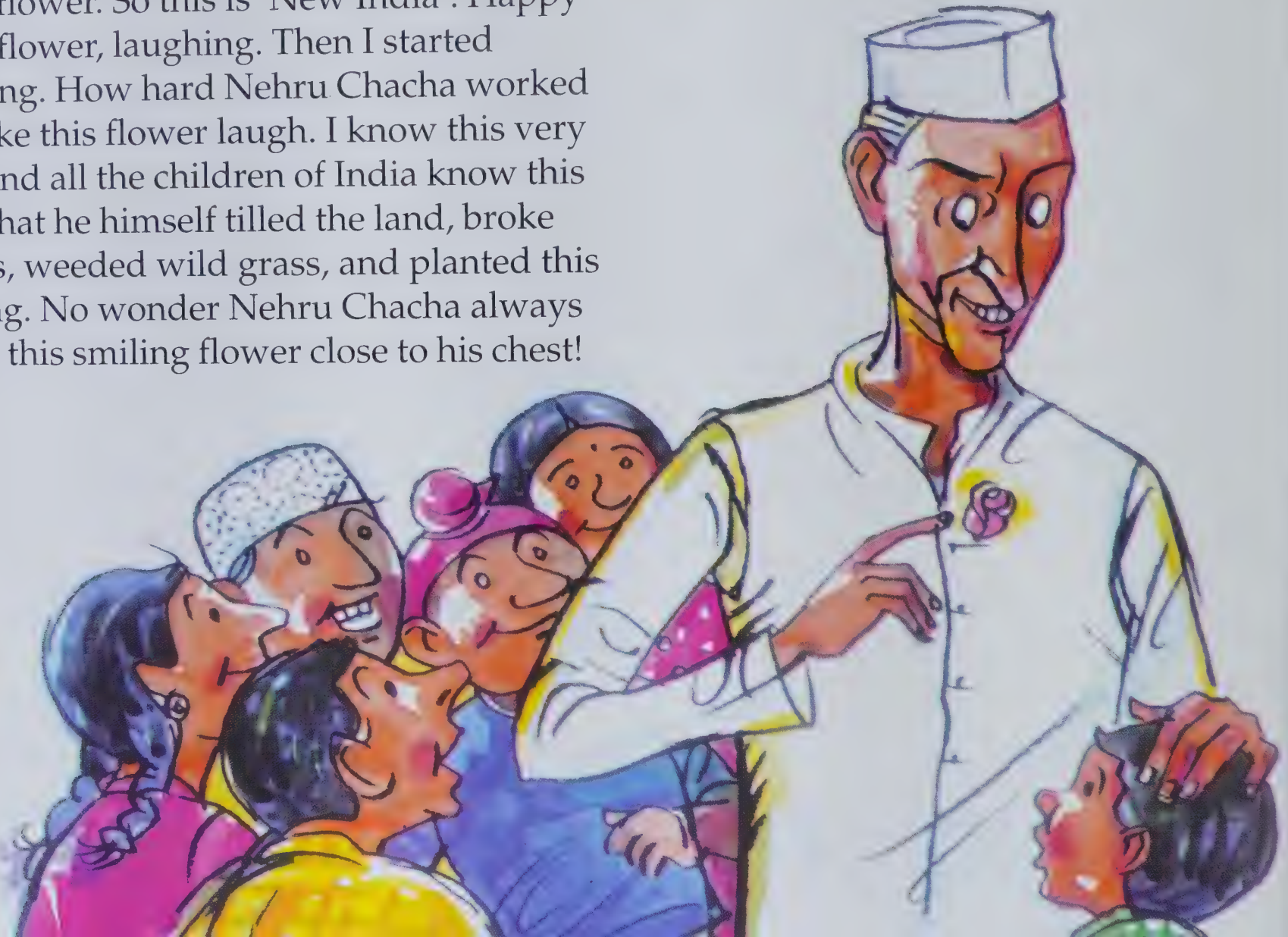
He laughed and said, "'New India' has already been built."

"What...? When was it built...? Where is it...?" I enquired happily.

"Look at this photograph of Pandit Nehru. You can see 'New India' in it," he opened his file and showed me a newspaper. I looked at it carefully.



There was a big red rose on the chest of Nehru Chacha and he himself was smiling like a flower. So this is 'New India'. Happy like a flower, laughing. Then I started thinking. How hard Nehru Chacha worked to make this flower laugh. I know this very well and all the children of India know this too. That he himself tilled the land, broke stones, weeded wild grass, and planted this sapling. No wonder Nehru Chacha always keeps this smiling flower close to his chest!



The Magic Box

Far from the city, under high mountains, was a small village 'Ahmakpur'. No railway line passed through the village and no one had television. No bus went there nor any letters came. All the people of this village lived peacefully and happily. They never stirred out of the village and no one came to them either. The name of the village chief was Bhujbhujkar Shah who was very brave and the most intelligent and powerful man. The villagers respected and obeyed him and

were in awe of him. Bhujbhujkar's specific orders were that no one should stir out of the village, because there were thieves and dacoits roaming about on the roads of the towns who could cheat, fraud, loot and even kill a man.

Once it so happened that a terrible storm struck the village. The wind was so strong that clothes, utensils and even children started flying in the air. Abdul was trying to catch hold of his pigeon and lo, he was also blown off with the wind. The wind carried him far and ultimately dropped him in a town's market. Abdul was terrified. So many people around him and so many cars and cycles and shops. He wanted to return to his village.

He had only one rupee in his pocket and he thought, 'Let me take a present for my wife.' There was a toy shop right in front of him. He went to the shopkeeper and said, "Please give me a present for my wife." The shopkeeper put a small mirror in a box and gave it to him. Abdul asked, "What is this?"

The shopkeeper replied, "It is a magic box. You can see shows in it."

No one had seen a mirror in Abdul's village. Abdul opened the box and saw his own face in the mirror. He was frightened. Who was this man? How did he come with me from the town? This is really a magic box!

Oh... there is a ghost in it. I will make friends with this ghost and frighten everyone.

At night before going to sleep he took out the mirror and again saw himself in it. He was frightened, "Oh! So this ghost has followed me even to my bed. What to do now?"

His wife asked him, "What is it? What are you hiding from me?" Abdul gave the mirror to his wife.

The wife looked at it carefully and said, "So you have brought with you this beautiful woman from the town. Now what should I do?"

She went with the mirror to her mother-in-law and said, "Look Ammaji, Abdul has brought a beautiful lady from the town."

The old mother-in-law was surprised. Taking the mirror in her hand she looked at it attentively and said to her daughter-in-law, "No dear, she is an old woman. Don't bother. She will die in a few days."

But the old lady felt alarmed. She thought that Bhujbhujkar will read some *mantras* and force this intruder to quit the village.

So the mother-in-law went to Bhujbhujkar and said, "Look at this object. An old witch is sitting in it. She will kill my son."

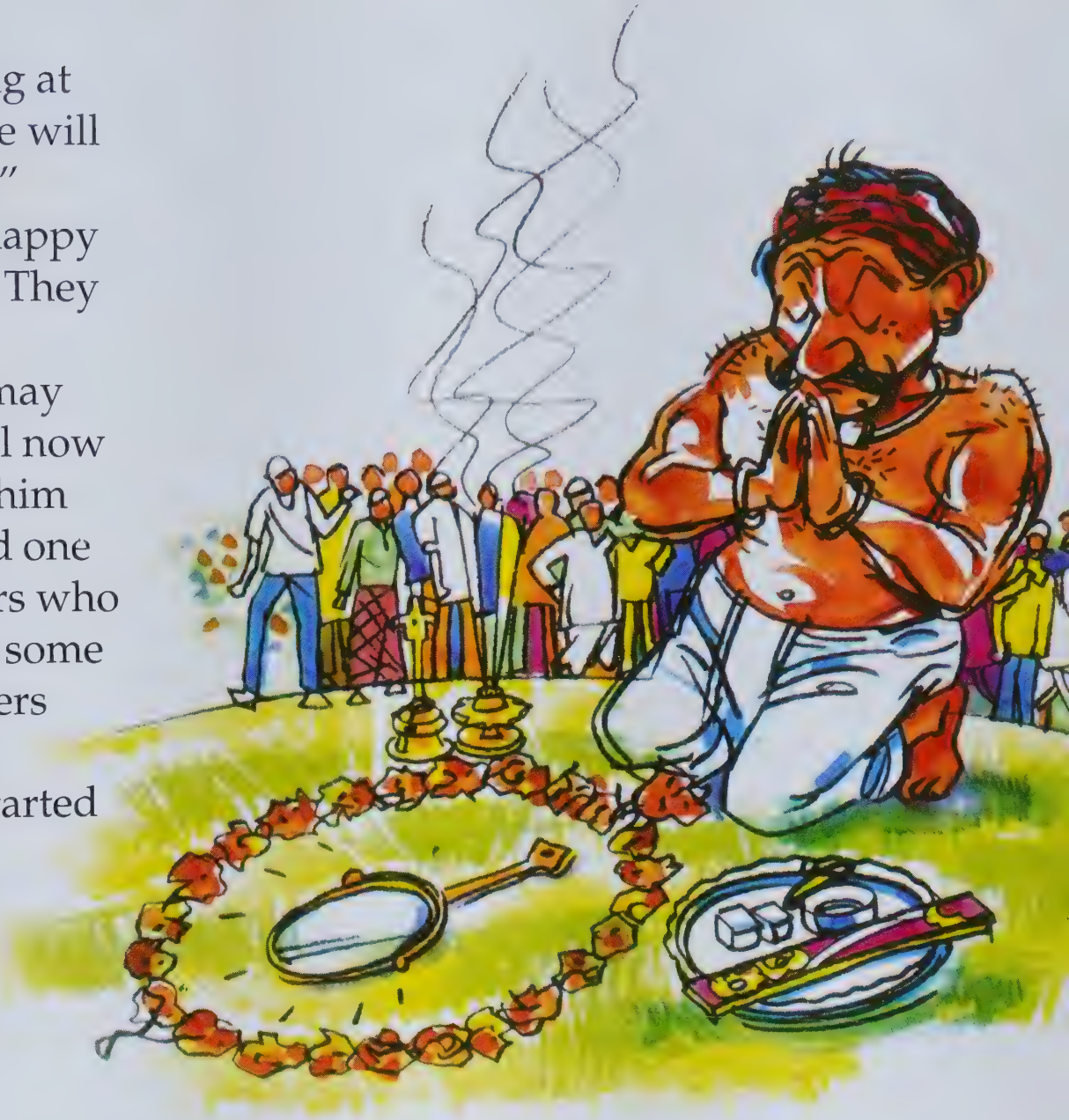
Slowly the word spread. The villagers got alarmed. They thought that a ghost had entered their village.

Motu was the bravest man in the village. When he heard of a ghost, he shouted, "Where is he? I will kill him at once." Abdul put the mirror in front of him. Motu looked at it with attention and was frightened. Stepping back he said to himself, 'He seems to be a very powerful wrestler. If I go to fight with him, he will certainly defeat me.' Putting down the mirror on the ground face downwards he

said, "He got frightened looking at me and has gone away. Now he will never come back to the village."

All the villagers were very happy to learn that the ghost had left. They cheered loudly.

But Bhujbhujkar said, "He may come again to our village. I will now chant some *mantras* and finish him for ever." Bhujbhujkar collected one rupee each from all the villagers who had gathered. He arranged for some sweets and flowers. The villagers assembled to witness the final departure of the ghost. They started



beating the drums loudly to scare the ghost away. Bhujbhujkar coloured his face black to frighten the ghost. He chanted the *mantras* loudly and hit the mirror with a big stone. The mirror broke and its pieces fell every where.

Bhujbhujkar fell down unconscious as the glass pieces hit him hard on the face.

"Oh dear, he has slayed Bhujbhujkar," whispered the villagers and started crying.

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